

## **2006 State of the City Address 2/23/06**

Mayor Michael B. Coleman

### **Media Final Draft**

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Below is the full text of the Mayor's State of the City Address. This is embargoed until 6:00 p.m., Thursday, February 23, 2006.

Mayor Coleman will be available for short interviews following the speech. We will have a separate room set up for these interviews.

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Thank you for that fine introduction by Shaon Shansul, our KidSpeak Mayor, here tonight with his family. Thank you to the Living Faith Mass Choir, with Sharon Francis, led by Tracey Posey.

Let me acknowledge our partners for progress:

- City Auditor Hugh Dorrian and City Attorney Rick Pfeiffer.
- City Council President Matt Habash, Members of City Council: Michael Mentel, Kevin Boyce, Charleta Tavares, Mary Jo Hudson, Maryellen O'Shaughnessy and Patsy Thomas.
- As well as our new Municipal Clerk of Courts Lori Tyack.

Thank you to all the other elected officials here tonight, representing our partners in the County, Paula Brooks President of the County Commission, suburbs and townships of Central Ohio and from the Statehouse. Our State Representative Joyce Beatty and Dr. Gene Harris, leader of our schools.

I want to thank Columbus' 1st Lady, Frankie Coleman, as well as our children, JD, Justin, and Kim, for being there every moment. I also want to acknowledge my brother Jeff, and Frankie's mother, Grandma. Please stand. Finally, I want to acknowledge my team, my cabinet and staff, who take on every challenge and believe so strongly in this City, led by Chief of Staff Guy Worley. To all of you here tonight, welcome.

Most of all tonight, let me thank all City employees, and the leaders of Organized Labor who represent them so well. We honor you, especially tonight as City employees are not only doing their duty to make our City better, they are called to duty by our nation as well. Right now, 53 City employees have been called to active duty in the military guard and reserves. We honor those employees for their service to the City, we honor them for their service to the nation. And I want to recognize their families tonight, for the great sacrifice they have made both at home and abroad. I would ask those families to please stand with us tonight so that we may offer you our thanks.

Tonight I want to speak to you about Progress... Opportunity... and Responsibility. The progress that has brought us here tonight. The opportunity that will propel us to the next level. The responsibility that each of us have to ourselves and to our city.

In Columbus, there is no difference between each of us and the least of us. We are all members of the Columbus family – due dignity, due respect, due not a guarantee, but a chance. There are 2 kinds of cities in America - those cities whose best days are behind them, they've already reached their peak, and now sadly tumble into decline. Cities where job losses have brought population loss, cities where residents don't plan their futures, they plan their escapes.

Then there are cities like Columbus - whose best days are ahead of them. Cities where tomorrow is better than yesterday, cities where residents ask '*what's next?*' instead of '*what now?*' That's why I call Columbus America's 21<sup>st</sup> Century City. My friends, the state of our City is strong.

We've gathered here tonight in TechColumbus' Business Technology Center... a great example of progress in Columbus. The BTC is an incubator for technology-based start-up companies – they provide space for offices, laboratories, manufacturing – and they offer expertise to help transform great ideas into great companies. The BTC has produced hundreds of jobs in Columbus, with total wages of almost \$17 million. This Science and Technology Campus – known as SciTech – represents the triumph of cooperation between the City, the State, and The Ohio State University – and takes advantage of the human assets of Columbus to help grow new companies and new jobs.

One of the graduates of the BTC program is Entrotech. Jim McGuire founded Entrotech in this building in 1999. Entrotech uses polymer science to aid in the production of a wide range of products from helicopter rotor blades, to computer disk drives, and even Lacrosse sticks. Today, Entrotech has expanded its operations, bringing 25 jobs and \$10 million in annual sales. In short, we could use more Jim McGuires. Jim started his company when he was just 38, the average age of his employees is 33-years-old with an average salary of \$85,000! Most are graduates of The Ohio State University.

Every year our local colleges and universities graduate 20,000 students – talented people whose skills attract employers, and whose ambition and investment create opportunities. But, more young people leave the state of Ohio than any other state in the nation. Fortunately, Columbus has one of the 10 largest populations of young and educated people in the country, with more than 100,000 students attending 20 institutions of higher learning in this region. Keeping our young people here will ensure that Columbus continues to grow. We must redefine economic development as a question not only of attracting just jobs, but of attracting people as well, especially our young, our talented, our future. I have asked the Columbus Chamber of Commerce to help us reach this goal.

Our young are restless, restless for change, restless for opportunities, they go where energy abounds and where progress is evident and I want them to stay right here. I want our young and talented to add to our 10,500 new jobs already created in Columbus since the year 2000. I want them to participate in more than \$3.2 billion in private investment in economic growth since 2000. One thing the young and talented want in a city is downtown housing. This age group – more than any other age group - wants to live close to the center of town. Fortunately, their opportunity to do just that expands every day in Columbus. With 1,100 new housing units completed downtown, and 2,700 more in the pipeline, we will see 10,000 new condos and apartments in Downtown by the year 2012, just six years from now. We are providing the full spectrum of housing affordability in our Downtown, high income, moderate

income as well as low income, and I will continue to make it a priority. Downtown is for everyone, and in the coming years, we project 15,000 new residents living downtown. They will need places to eat, clothes to buy, coffee shops and retail stores. Maybe these young people, armed with degrees in engineering, chemistry or urban design, can work in the New Lazarus building, which is being renovated as the largest Green Rehab project in the nation. Lazarus building, a big part of this city's history, went dark, comes back to life with thousands of employees working in it and pumping new energy into the River South District. We thank Kyle Rooney, Turner Construction Vice President and General Manager and Rick Lombardi, Vice President and Operations Manager. The Lazarus building is just one of many Get Green Columbus initiatives that is moving forward, I hope you take the time to read the first year report on your seat tonight.

We've made tremendous progress in many areas in our city, especially last year. Two great milestones occurred in 2005.

The first is that we changed a 50-year-old city policy that said "Grow at all costs." Last year, that policy changed to "Pay as we grow" meaning as this city grows, many stakeholders pay for the streets, schools, parks, safety, sanitation and city operations as our city expands, not afterward.

The second great milestone will be the most significant job generator in Central Ohio since Honda in Marysville. The Advanced Logistics Hub, where trucks and trains meet planes to distribute products to consumers all over the world. This Hub, located near Rickenbacker will create 69,000 jobs over the next 20 years. We negotiated a Joint Economic Development District this past year with 3 governmental jurisdictions where the City of Columbus will share in some \$163 million in new income taxes, and \$600 million in new property taxes for our region. We expect \$9 billion in new private sector investment and \$20 billion in new wages for workers. The Advanced Logistics Hub will be a powerhouse for this community and will change the region for the next 50 years. Our thanks go to: Elaine Roberts, Columbus Regional Airport Authority President and CEO, Kathy Ransier, the Board Chair, Bob Clark, representing Congressman David Hobson, Pickaway County Commissioner John Stevenson, and Harrison Township Trustee Paul Welsh.

As we promote regional development and job creation we must continue to fight for jobs and business expansion in the center of our universe, downtown. Just a few years ago, the downtown office vacancy rate was the highest in the nation. Now, it is at its lowest point in five years even after more than one million square feet of new commercial space has been created. The tide is changing from businesses leaving our center city to businesses recognizing that the future of their success is intertwined with the future of our core.

I am pleased to announce today that we have another new company that will call downtown its corporate home! We are proud to state tonight that Ohio Health will be relocating their corporate headquarters to 180 East Broad Street, the corner of Broad and 4<sup>th</sup>. Ohio Health's move represents true leadership, that we hope others will follow. They are a marquee player in the health care industry, providing excellent care to residents through their hospitals, medical innovation and commitment to quality. You know them as Grant Hospital, Riverside Hospital, Doctor's Hospital along with other hospitals in our state. Their move downtown brings more than 350 employees and a payroll in excess of \$22 million dollars. The health care industry is the #1 source of jobs over the next decade in America, what better thing to do

than headquarter a giant in the industry in the center of our city. I would also like to thank Councilmember Mary Jo Hudson and President Matt Habash for their leadership. David Blom, President & Chief Executive Officer for Ohio Health, with his team is here tonight.

As we fight for jobs, we must also acknowledge the three great challenges remaining in our downtown.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Challenge is the future of City Center Mall. There are no quick answers to solving the problems at City Center Mall, and we can expect the situation will only get worse, maybe a lot worse, before it gets better. We are in a continuing dialogue with the owners, the Mills Corporation, over their efforts to redevelop the property. While we stand ready to be of assistance to Mills in that effort, we must be prepared as a community in the undesirable event that Mills decides to hand over the keys. It will likely take years and significant public investment to turn the Center into something new, and vibrant, but just like we did with Northland Mall, just like we did with the historic Lazarus building, just like we are doing now with so many other tough challenges, we will work together, in the public and private sector, to build a better future.

The second challenge is parking. We have too much where we don't need it, and too little where we do. Where people can't park, they can't shop. Where people can't park, they can't work. Where people can't park, they can't live. We need a downtown parking strategy and only then will we meet our full potential for economic development. That's why we'll be working with City Council on a comprehensive plan for downtown parking.

Third, we must look at new ways to help move people easily, safely and conveniently through downtown, from the various destinations, jobs, shops, theaters, restaurants and new Condos and Apartments. We need a better system to reconnect our neighborhoods to downtown, and to connect people with the places they want to go. And the natural paths are along the great spines of our City, High Street and Broad Street. We know we're turning the corner with all the progress we're making in revitalizing our downtown. Nearly 110,000 people work downtown today. Another 33,000 students attend classes. 4,500 people live downtown, with thousands more on the way, and 20,000 people live in the nearby neighborhoods. A million conventioners visit our city every year. We've got new projects popping up all over, from the new Huntington Park, home of the Clippers, to the new RiverSouth neighborhood. And every time we turn around there's another new housing project underway like last week's announcement of North Bank Tower.

But one thing we need is a better way to get all these people from one end of the downtown to the other. So how about this? Imagine connecting the north to the south, that is from The Ohio State University to the Brewery District and from the Arena District to RiverSouth. How convenient would it be to connect the east side to the west side, from Grant Hospital and the Discovery District to Franklinton near COSI. I've heard ideas, I've seen proposals, and I've listened to many points of view, but I've seen no results, so tonight I am asking City leaders, business leaders and community leaders to look to Columbus' future by embracing a part of our past. That is to imagine a future with rail Street Cars once again gracing our streets, moving our people and energizing our core. OhioHealth, Grange Insurance, Battelle, Nationwide Insurance Company, the Convention Facilities Authority, The Columbus Dispatch,

The Columbus Downtown Development Corporation, and the City of Columbus will set aside a quarter million dollars to thoroughly investigate this issue with a working group of stakeholders to determine if this is right for Columbus.

My criteria for moving ahead will be based on three principles: first - it must have an economic impact, it must promote economic development and jobs. Second - it must reconnect neighborhoods and the destinations in downtown; and third - if a rail street car is initiated, it must be affordable to build and operate without a citywide tax increase. This will not be a part of COTA's levy, but COTA will be at the table.

We know that connectivity drives economic development, It makes it easier for people to live and work downtown, and it's been proven effective in other cities. In Charlotte, they report more than \$400 million of development in just the past 4 years along their rail line. You may know that Columbus is no stranger to the Rail Streetcar, In fact, for decades streetcars were part of the very fabric of this community. That's until the automobile took its place, and rails were ripped from streets all over Columbus. Let us not fail to consider these new ideas, even if they are old. Let us not limit our questions as to why we can't... but open our eyes to see how we can and ask if we should.

We should embrace good ideas and do our best to make them a reality, that is the only way we will take Columbus to a higher level. For instance, three years ago, a man sat in my office with a vision, a detailed plan, a passion, but knew no one in Columbus. He had a vision that fit one of our city's needs, for a hometown airline with direct flights to cities around the nation. This was a clear cut case of an idea worth nurturing and embracing. We quietly rolled this idea uphill until it got legs on its own. After months of hard work and many meetings, persuasion, raising millions of dollars, planning, and preparation, we will be launching Columbus' first airline, Skybus. Skybus - headquartered in Columbus, jobs created in Columbus, connecting the world to Columbus and Columbus to the world, and most of all affordable, affordable to every family and to every business. Skybus, is nearly ready for take-off, with flights in 2007. The first plane will be inaugurated as the "Spirit of Columbus." Nationwide, Battelle Services, The Huntington National Bank, and Wolfe Enterprises funded the initial start up. Since then, money has been raised from institutional investors in New York and Columbus. At full operation, Skybus may generate up to 5.3 million new passengers in the region, create more than 700 new jobs, and create several thousand more jobs and businesses that support this airline. It will change the airline industry and it will reaffirm Columbus as a city of entrepreneurship, innovation and accessibility. Skybus will enhance the number of visitors and conventions to Columbus because we are easier to get to. Further, Skybus will attract new businesses to Columbus that need to fly their employees around the country with direct flights. A strong management team is coming together, led by Bill Diffenderffer, its' Chief Executive Officer, and Columbus leaders serve on the Skybus board led by the Chairman – "Captain" Bob Kidder. Founder John Weikle is here tonight with Bob Kidder and President Ken Gile. This is progress!

The story of progress in Columbus is also the story of our neighborhoods. Some of our most challenged neighborhoods are transforming before our eyes. Like in the King Lincoln District, which is a miracle in the making, a place that was once the center of culture, commerce, civics and church for the African American Community. A neighborhood where 68,000 people thrived in the 1940s, declined over the decades to a place where the *average* income left families in poverty, where only 25% owned homes and where the residential population

withered to only 16,000 people. Now, new commercial buildings are replacing vacant lots... new apartments, condos and single family homes are taking the place of boarded up buildings. Where crime and crack were once common, hope is back and we are on track for a better future.

The historic Lincoln Theater, at one time the only theater where Black families could enjoy live entertainment in our city has been saved from neglect and will be totally rebuilt within the next two years. Seven major projects are currently underway: Gateway Building at Long and Hamilton, Lincoln Theater, Whitney Young Apartments, NOBO, Monroe Cluster, St. Paul AME Health Center, and Hamilton Park Condominiums. Together they mean more than \$30 million in new investment in a neighborhood that had seen nothing but generations of neglect. Thank you to all of the neighborhood leaders who have helped drive this forward.

We've made great additions to neighborhoods throughout Columbus: we opened two new recreation centers so far this year, built two neighborhood policing centers with a third now being planned in partnership with OSU in the University District. Working with Councilmember Michael Mentel, we opened 4 new fire stations with one on the way on the West Side, to join a new Family Health Center that we will build nearby. We've built a new park along the riverfront and we've identified South Parsons Avenue Commercial Corridor as an area of future redevelopment. This year we will begin replacing the crumbling Main Street Bridge with a beautiful sweeping new bridge that will represent Columbus long into the future. We've been successful in bringing back the Morse Road corridor with new public investment for sidewalks, medians and new development at the old Northland Mall site. And the Campus Gateway is now open for business, I'm so proud of our partnership with the Ohio State University and Campus Partners.

I want to thank all of our Financial Institutions, who stepped up to invest in our neighborhoods like never before through the Partnership for America's 21<sup>st</sup> Century City. And I'd like to welcome Grange Bank to the Partnership for committing \$75 million over the next five years in neighborhoods of need. Grange Bank President Steve Jones is here tonight.

And we've made strides to keep our neighborhoods safe. When a crime spree infected our City this past summer, we countered with a new Strike Force and an Anti-Gang Initiative that have collectively resulted in some 546 arrests, and more still to come from on-going undercover investigations. Our efforts have had results. While homicides are unpredictable, some years up and some years down, I am pleased to say the per capita crime rate in Columbus today is lower now than at any time in the last 5 years. We will not rest on our accomplishments, we will not compromise our commitment to combat threats to public safety, and we will continue to search for innovative solutions.

I also want to thank a partner who has truly stepped up in the past year, and that is our team of volunteers at Crime Stoppers. Led by Kevin Miles and Detective Gerald Milner, they worked in partnership with the Division of Police and took citizens' tips leading to 178 arrests in 2005. Kevin Miles and Detective Milner are here tonight, thank you.

While other cities look to stay the course, in Columbus, we accept nothing less than progress. But even as we take pride in our progress, and fulfill opportunities for the future, we must also accept our responsibility to fight that which holds us back.

That's why tonight I am declaring a new city mission. A mission that will not be stopped by bureaucracy or unscrupulous landlords, by lawyers or lobbyists, by finger-pointers or the irresponsible, and that is a mission to end the disease of vacant and abandoned housing in Columbus. Columbus has roughly 3,200 vacant properties. This map shows the concentration of vacant housing in Columbus. There are cities with far worse problems - Cleveland has more than 25,000 vacant properties, Baltimore has more than 42,000, Indianapolis has more than 8,000. But we will not sit idly by, waiting for the problem to get worse. I know that what may look like a statistic to bureaucrats is a very real problem to every family living next to an abandoned house. Vacant and abandoned housing breeds crime, promotes poverty, blights communities and cripples neighborhoods. Tonight I say to you - the blight of vacant and abandoned housing is unacceptable, and governments at every level need to work together to fix the problem. That is why we are developing an aggressive plan to turn these blights on our neighborhoods into homes once again. For too long, we have nibbled at the edges of this growing problem instead of attacking it head on. Last year we spent only \$219,000 to demolish vacant and abandoned housing in Columbus. That's clearly not good enough to do the job. Tonight, I am proposing \$25 million dollars over the next six years, for a new neighborhood revitalization effort called HOME AGAIN. With this new investment we will help fix-up, or acquire, or tear down 1,000 properties and entire neighborhoods will be lifted up.

HOME AGAIN is a five point plan of action: Prevention, Enforcement, Acquisition, Rehabilitation or Demolition.

Tonight I am putting the offenders on notice – your vacant houses are a threat to our city, a threat to our neighborhoods, and a threat we will not tolerate. The gloves come off, we are identifying the worst of the worst owners and going after them. We will end owners profiteering and proliferation of poverty and misery and neighborhood destruction, because you will have nowhere to run. To my right is City Councilmembers Patsy Thomas and Maryellen O'Shaughnessy, and City Attorney Rick Pfeiffer, who will come after you. Pfeiffer has streamlined our process for prosecuting the worst of the worst and appointed attorney's to these cases full time, working together with our Code Enforcement Officers and Police.

To my left is the Columbus and Franklin County Affordable Housing Trust Corporation and Mark Milligan, The Ohio Capital Corporation for Housing, led by Hal Keller, and the Ohio Housing Finance Agency led by Doug Garver, who will each contribute resources, talent and expertise. With us also is County Treasurer Richard Cordray, who is committed and has created the County's first Land Bank to assist in this mission. And standing all around you is the community - who is fed up! They don't want to take it any more, and they won't have to.

There exists a gathering storm that could represent the largest concentration of privately owned vacant and abandoned structures in our city's history. I'm speaking of Woodland Meadows, the future of this eastside apartment complex is in doubt. We've made the families our first priority, and we are committed to help relocate hundreds living there because of the numerous safety violations found at Woodland Meadows. The City and its partners will continue to staff a service center nearby to assist individuals and families who want to move out. But what is to become of the property? 122 buildings – on 52 acres of land. I've been asked that many times, and it is a difficult challenge, a private property over which the City has no control. I am here to say to the current owner and any future owner of the property

that we are willing to work with you to turn this property into an asset. But if you sit on your hands or fail to cooperate, I am here to say: Get Out Of the Way!

As we look at these challenges, there is one specific trend - both tragic and disturbing – that afflicts us, and needs focused attention right now. That is the destructive reality of homicides in Columbus. Last year there were 104 homicides, all of them needless, all of them tragic. The New York Times recently wrote an article about this national problem, where anger turns into deadly violence, where arguments turn into gun-shots. While violent crime continues to go down in Columbus, and our per capita crime levels are low compared to other cities, far too many young African American men are killing each other.

- 72% of arrested murder suspects in Columbus last year were black;
- 77% of murder victims were black;
- and 68% of both victims and suspects were black men under the age of 30.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is not a police problem, or an enforcement issue. This is a community issue, and it will take the community to assume responsibility. Let me break this down a little more. Across America, a young black man is more likely to go to jail, be on probation or parole, than to go to college. Equally staggering, 68% of African American families do not have a male adult in the household. Black men - we are not raising our children! And as a father, there is no more important role than raising our children. We must take responsibility. We must confront the moral crisis that is overwhelming a generation of young African Americans. There are strong role models in the African American community, doctors, lawyers and teachers, who worked hard to get where they are, but climbing the mountain always requires that we reach back to bring up the next generation. Just last month, City councilmember Kevin Boyce and I convened a summit of more than 100 community leaders on Dr. Martin Luther King Day. From that meeting, and our follow up discussions, we are creating the “African American Male Empowerment Commission,” focused on young black males, on Fatherhood Initiatives, mentorship programs, and a partnership with the school system with Dr. Gene Harris. Its goals are to prevent black on black homicide, and reduce crime, by strengthening families. This commission will work with faith-based institutions, businesses and social organizations, and the school system to focus on empowering black men. The co-chairs of this effort are: Jerry Saunders, Walter Smith, Eric Troy and Reverend Harold Hudson. We need every resident's voice to be active in the neighborhoods and give positive role modeling to the young men.

The City is a committed partner, especially in working to provide young people summer jobs. In March, we will be rolling out a \$1 million dollar effort to create a summer youth employment program called Columbus/Franklin County Youth Works. This will be a partnership between the City, County and the Central Ohio Workforce Investment Corporation, headed by Suzanne Coleman-Tolbert. Our goal is to help train and employ 2,000 young people this summer, giving them a new sense of responsibility and confidence. We need more help on this, especially from the business community, because you have the ability to expand the pool of jobs, please be a part of Youth Works.

Raising kids is hard work, I know, Frankie and I raised three kids, and we know it took the help of friends and neighbors, family and teachers, coaches and employers. It is our collective responsibility to do this, not only for our children, but all of the children of Columbus, it is the best investment we can make.



I believe in our City. I believe that Columbus is destined for greatness. I believe when we are called to act, called to duty, we respond. Tonight I'm calling this City to duty. Let us fight vacant properties with all we've got. I'm calling us to take responsibility to put our arms around African American boys, give them guidance, give them hope, give them a compass so they can find their way when they get older. Give kids a summer job. Be part of making this City vibrant. Support Columbus' own airline - SkyBus. We've made so much progress as a city, and our opportunities abound. Our responsibilities we must embrace, and only then can we be proud.

One of my proudest moments as Mayor was when this city came together in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. In just a single day we opened up our hearts and our wallets to raise more than a half-million dollars on the steps of City Hall to help our brothers and sisters in the Gulf Coast. 27 TV and Radio Stations set aside their competitive nature and came together to help. I want to thank you again. Tonight we're joined by one of the families that was helped that day, the family of Bertha and Terence Stapleton Senior, along with their son Terence and daughters Jessica and Joyce. They came to Columbus from Gulf Port, Mississippi, in the wake of devastation, and we welcomed them and some 2000 other evacuees to Columbus with open arms.

Columbus united as our businesses made contributions in the thousands of dollars and people came from all over to help. But the one memory that stands out the most did not involve thousands of dollars, but loose change from a young boy in a minivan. He was seven and his name is John Paul. He leaned forward with a big Batman piggy bank. His Batman piggy bank was heavy with coins, and he said he'd been saving his money all of his life. He emptied every penny, quarter, nickel and dime into my container. His mother, Lynn, watched with tears of pride flowing down her cheek. I said, "you want to give all your savings?" and he responded, "Yes, I gotta do what I got to do." That young boy with his Batman piggy bank knew he was called to duty, and he did what he had to do, let's take a lesson from him and never forget. Citizens of Columbus - Let's do what we gotta do. Thank you and May God Bless America and May God Bless Columbus.